

Dear Montgomery County Council Members,

I am writing to provide testimony against the Vaccine Passport initiated by the County Executive, Mark Elrich, and under consideration by the council. I happen to be highly educated and a practicing public health scientist who has spent much time over the last two years examining the data and trying to fully understand the science – not only of the virus but also of the damage done by the cascading effects of the policy decisions. I also happen to be a mother to two young boys and have my own case study evidence to draw on which impacts me personally. I believe that the science is clear that vaccines do not prevent either infection nor transmission of the current variants of the virus. Some could argue this for Delta but it is very clear for Omicron as many people who have received the original full course of their vaccines and a supplemental booster dose have subsequently both caught COVID and spread it to their close contacts. Therefore, I will not harp on the futility of mandating a non-sterilizing vaccine to go into a restaurant to eat, theater to watch a movie, etc. Instead, I would like to focus on kids and how this has impacted them and their mental, psychological, and physical development and how restricting access to recreational facilities will further harm them.

I have spent most of the last 17 years of my professional life studying obesity and poor lifestyle options, mainly for children but also for adults. First, I would like to talk about physical development. This seems the most clear-cut of the impacts. Initially, many options for physical exercise outside were cut off, in the early days of the pandemic, especially for kids who did not have yards of their own to play in. Then these kids were forced to do virtual schooling for far longer than most every other school district in the country. Chained to their Chromebooks for well over a year, they sat. This resulting weight gain has been well documented in scientific publications. In one recent CDC publication¹, the authors found weight gain was substantial and dramatic during the first year of the pandemic compared to the prepandemic period with BMI approximately doubling. This increase was more pronounced in those who were already struggling with their weight prior to March 2020 and in children aged 5-11. This in and of itself is troubling as those who experience overweight and obesity in youth are challenged with lifelong challenges to control their weight. More concerning is that weight, especially rapid weight gain, is a major risk factor for the developing youth-onset type 2 diabetes. There were several presentations during the 2021 American Diabetes Association meeting held last summer detailing the astonishing rate of new-onset type 2 diabetes during the first year of the pandemic. One of these presentations was from a researcher at George Washington University who examined cases presenting at Children's National Hospital – many of whom were likely to be residents of Montgomery County due to the geographic proximity. Explicitly, the number of cases presenting to CNMC with overt, new onset type 2 diabetes increased 182% in the first year of the pandemic compared to the previous year.² This number disproportionately impacted black males which goes against the findings from other previously well documented epidemiological³ and trial based studies⁴. This is especially troubling since there are not many effective treatment options for controlling glycemia in youth and the majority will have to begin using insulin within 2 years. These children will be hampered their entire life with the complications related to type 2 diabetes with multiple co-morbidities which they will have to battle during what should be their most productive years. A recent publication in the New England Journal of Medicine (full disclosure, I am a co-author) showed that within 15 years, 80% of the cohort had experienced either diabetic kidney, eye or nerve disease with nearly 68% having diagnosed hypertension and over 50% having dyslipidemia.⁵ Therefore, taking away opportunities for children to have physical activities in recreation facilities seems to only add more harm. This seems even more injurious when considering that youth are at a very low risk for any complications related to COVID but at more of a risk for the lifelong consequences of reduced activity. It also seems to belie the vision statement of the county being more equitable

and inclusive though thriving youth and families. If this is truly the vision of the county, then the only choice is to vote against the passport.

Now for my personal case study. My two children are now 5 and 8 and one of them is immunocompromised due to ongoing chemotherapy treatment for leukemia. We have seen firsthand the mental, psychological, and functional development in our children due to the excessive pandemic precautions. My children are filled with anxiety and as time has dragged on the anxiety only grows. As is noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, we are in the middle of a mental health crisis for our children and as we have to do whatever we can to help them, both as parents and policymakers. One of the things that has helped my children soldier on through the pandemic has been is the ability to participate in physical activities with other kids. This is especially true for my older son who has continued with karate throughout – transitioning from virtual to outside to inside. I imagine he is not alone, although the activity will be child specific. I have never had to share any of my children's vaccination history with any of their activity groups and I do not plan to start now. I imagine I am not alone. This is their private health information and I intend to keep it private. Therefore, if this policy is enacted, we will pull our children from their activities in Montgomery County. This would be extremely sad and would harm my kids but it would be your fault. This totally harkens to a totalitarian society and I do not intend to pander to it. Therefore, we will take their activities out of the county. While this might seem to you like an impractical move, I can tell you it is not. We have already taken all of our other activities out of the county (eating, shopping), so what is one more for the few months that we will remain here. Oh, that's right, after living here for 17 years and supporting the tax base in the county, we are moving. I was recruited for and have accepted a job elsewhere. While in the before times this would not have been considered because living here offered a lot of opportunities to justify the exorbitant property values and high cost of living. However, freedom of choice and desire to not being subjected to restrictive policies made by uninformed politicians has driven us away. But not to fear, we will still be here in June in order to vote each and every one of you out of office if you take away any more of the few civil liberties we have left away. Do what you can to save your job and vote against the vaccine passport.

References:

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3. Dabelea D, Mayer-Davis EJ, Saydah S, et al. Prevalence of type 1 and type 2 diabetes among children and adolescents from 2001 to 2009. JAMA 2014; 311: 1778-86.
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